

Miriwoong language

Miriwoong (Miriwung) is an Australian Indigenous language which today has fewer than 20 fluent speakers, most of whom live in or near Kununurra in Western Australia.^[4] All of the fluent speakers are elderly and the Miriwoong language is considered to be critically endangered. However, younger generations tend to be familiar with a lot of Miriwoong vocabulary which they use when speaking Kimberley Kriol or Aboriginal English.

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Linguo-genetic categorisation

Miriwoong is categorised by linguists as a Non-Pama-Nyungan language and part of the Jarrakan subgroup.

Sign

As is common in many Australian language communities, the Miriwoong people have a signed language that is used in addition to the spoken languages of the community.

Miriwoong

Region

Kununurra,
Western
Australia

Ethnicity

Miriwung

Native speakers

156 (2016
census)^[1]

Language family

Jarrakan

▪ Miriwoong

Dialects

Gajirrawung
? Dulbung

Signed forms

Miriwoong Sign
Language

Language codes

ISO 639-3

mep

Glottolog

miri1266 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/miri1266)^[2]

AIATSIS^[3]

K29 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/K29)



(red) Miriwoong language

(purple) other Jarrakan languages

(grey) other non-Pama-Nyungan languages

Multilingualism

Despite the endangered status of the Miriwoong language, the Miriwoong community is vibrantly multilingual. Languages spoken include Miriwoong (for a small number of speakers), the Miriwoong signed language, Kimberley Kriol, and English. Two varieties of English are present in the community, Aboriginal English, and Standard Australian English. Many speakers are bi-dialectal in both varieties while many others have a strong preference for Aboriginal English.

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring

The Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring (<http://mirima.org.au/>) Language and Culture Centre has been tasked with the preservation and revitalisation of the Miriwoong language since the 1970s.^[5]

MDWg (<http://mirima.org.au/>) engages in a wide range of language revitalisation and documentation activities including a language nest, public language classes and on-country training camps. The language nest reaches around 300 children every week, both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous.

A significant part of MDWg's revitalisation efforts is the publication of books in Miriwoong.

Some grammatical features

Phonology

Vowels

The vowel system of Miriwoong comprises the following four vowel phonemes. Length is not phonemic.

	front	central	back
high	i		u
mid		ə	
low		a	

Consonants

Miriwoong distinguishes 19 consonant phonemes. The consonant inventory of Miriwoong is fairly typical for Indigenous Australian languages, having multiple lateral and nasal consonants, no voicing contrast, and no fricatives.

	<u>Peripheral</u>		<u>Laminal</u>		<u>Apical</u>	
	<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Lamino-dental</u>	<u>Lamino-palatal</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Retroflex</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	b	g	ɖ	ɟ	d	ɖ
<u>Nasal</u>	m	ŋ	ɳ	ɲ	n	ɳ
<u>Trill</u>					r	
<u>Lateral</u>				ʎ	l	ɭ
<u>Approximant</u>	w		j		ɤ	

Orthography

The largely phonemic orthography of Miriwoong was developed at the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring. Some sounds that do not have a standard character in the Latin script are represented by digraphs. The vowel /u/ is spelled **oo** in Miriwoong.

Grapheme	IPA symbol	Miriwoong example	English translation
Vowels			
a	a	dawang	place
e	ə	jawaleng	man
oo	u	joolang	dog
i	i	ngirrngiling	cat
iyi	ɪ: ~ iyi	ngiyi	yes
Monograph consonants			
b	b	bare	to stand
d	d	dooleng	heart
g	g	goondarring	fish
j	c~ɟ	wija	swim
K (only following n)	g	bankalng	footprints
l	l	biligirrimawoong	white
m	m	moonamang	magpie goose
n	n	Goonoonooram	Kununurra (river)
r	ɾ	ramang	grass
w	w	woothoony	small (f)
y	j	mayeng	non-meat food
Digraph consonants			
ly	ʎ	bilyiny	tick
ng	ŋ	ngerregoowoong	big
nh	ɲ	ngenhengbeng	red
ny	ɲ	gerany	rock
rd	ɖ	gardag	cup
rl	ʀ	gerloong	water
rn	ɳ	merndang	paper
rr	r	Darram	Bandicoot Bar (placename)
th	ɖ	thegoobeling	black

MDWg (<http://mirima.org.au/>) is working with local organisations to conform to the standardised orthography when Miriwoong is written in documents or signage.

See also: [Transcription of Australian Aboriginal languages](#)

Grammar

Some notable features of Miriwoong grammar are as follows.

Nouns

Gender

Miriwoong nouns have grammatical gender and adjectives and demonstratives agree with the noun. There are two genders designated masculine and feminine.

Case

Nouns are not marked for case in Miriwoong, although arguments are cross referenced on the verb, in most cases using a nominative-accusative pattern.

Verbs

Verbs in Miriwoong have a compound system of coverbs, which are generally uninflected and carry the main semantic content, and inflecting verbs, which carry the grammatical information. Both coverbs and verbs can stand alone but most verbal expressions comprise both a coverb and an inflecting verb^[6] (Newry 2015: 20-21). The inflecting verbs are a closed class and number around 20 while the coverbs are an open class. This type of verb system has been observed in other Australian languages, particularly in languages spoken in the north of Australia

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